

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part Six

**Living as a covert operative
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel.**

Another contact that springs to mind is James "my father was a Nazi sob" who drives a chopper, regularly points out that all the developmentally challenged kids he knows share his name, and who has a breakdown on acid while fixated on once having called me Andy.

Jer is probably from another planet. He's taller than any of us and his head is regularly in the clouds which makes him fun to chat with. In the future he's going to be completely bald and might be a super villain.

James and Jer were friends long before I meet them. I never meet Andy.

Then there's Sony, a slim, bubbly girl with a deceptively shy smile and loose black locks. I rarely meet her outside of parties.

She's in a group of friends who decide to take a biking trip from northern China down south to Thailand. I later assemble the details from various members of the group.

Consensus is that the food in China is overall lousy and greasy, the people are friendly and authorities not as bad as expected, the sights are sometimes breathtaking but usually boring, and it's a good fucking thing that Sony was packed on that plane and sent back for treatment

I'm told it's somewhere on the streets of Thailand that Sony snaps, deciding that she'll best be able to alleviate global suffering by knitting scarves for the children of the world. They find her wandering barefoot in some Bangkok alley, mumbling to herself.

Sony's family is tracked down whereupon it's learned that this is not the first time that something like this has happened. And had she been smoking a lot of marijuana? Oh, well that's not good.

Many months later I'm on a flight with a lengthy layover in Sony's city and she insists that I drop by and see her. It's a rare sunny day when we meet up.

Sony's shaved off all her hair and is powering through the streets with inhuman vigor as my tour guide. She says that they have her on lithium, but it doesn't seem to be working, so we go out for drinks.

It's over beers that Sony confirms the details of the China-Thailand trip. She knows she wasn't supposed to have been smoking pot but she just wanted to have some fun. Maybe I should feel a little guilty for the number of times I'd passed the dutchie pon that side but how was I to know?

I occasionally conduct business at Paloni's, an ex-pat dive along the old Hue Mai canal. Despite the sizzling heat outside, Paloni's always remains stoically dark, cold, and permanently infused with the smell of dank-beer-moldering carpet.

Among the small guest tables are scattered a number of billiard tables, to one side a small stage and dance floor (an assignment has me DJ here one night), all of it surrounding a central bar.

The establishment is frequented by Luke, the owner's feral child who, when not stealing patron's drinks or rummaging through their belongings, amuses himself by climbing onto the pool tables and lying spread-eagle in the middle of games. Sometimes he relieves himself right there and then. Lest we judge, what's an eight year old supposed to do in a bar at two in the morning?

Paloni's is also dear to my heart because I'm nearby at the time of the big one.

Natural disaster stories are cheap and plentiful and mine is no different so I'll leave out the pulpy details, but I think it's worth mentioning that I ride mine out on a square of Eric's blotter acid. First time and I'm told that the effects of the drug will take about an hour to kick in. An hour later, just as the lights start to flicker, they do.

Much like that experience at the Austrian inn, a number of my non-physical excursions would leave behind physical remnants. This night of acid-fuelled mayhem produces a heaping mass of them.

The self-flinging flower basket, the blankets discovered at the opposite side of the room in the morning, the missing pieces of jewellery later found in bizarre places, the mid-air sounds and phantom touches (also reported by visitors), the incessant sound of marbles dropping on the abandoned floor above - it all just becomes part of the daily.

But some people have trouble dealing with such things.

"You people are fucking crazy!! How the fuck can you drop acid at a time like this?! We're going to die here!! People are DEAD!!"

Yes, many people have died but we don't know them and what are we supposed to do anyway. Besides, we're safely camped out in the middle of a disused sports field so ... how can we *not*?

The girl wiggling out is a slim, early-twenties, go-getter type with an assertively blonde shock of hair, and she's clearly *not* Section material. Can't really remember her name but that's probably because she's only made it about four months and will shortly be on the next available flight out. Next I'd hear about her, she'd shackled up with some movie or photography guy on the west coast.

It's not an uncommon story. People who aren't cut out for the Section can burn up real quick. After that, losing it and bugging out are basically involuntary acts of self-preservation. Then again, no one ever promises that overseas assignments are easy.

I fill up a passport or two with visas and entry/exit stamps before I return home to resume life under a domestic cover identity. By day I'm tucked away in the corner of a warehouse owned by a company whose name translates (ironically?) to "complete", "whole", or "all". By night I'm running ops for Section B.

Most mission dossiers are archived in a colloquially named "Journal". Along with a variety of photos, videos, sounds, documents, and other physical artifacts, the Journal represents the only existing record of Section B.

Unfortunately, over the (nearly) twenty years that the Journal is active, parts are corrupted or go missing; but it can still make for some good diving.

I make a number of contributions to the Journal myself. Initially these are mostly infiltration missions: identify a (typically difficult to find) way in, locate the (usually concealed) equipment, disable the (often complex) controls and (regularly byzantine) surveillance systems, and find a (mostly undetectable) way to cover my tracks before punching the clock.

At times it can get pretty nervy but overall it's a good way to earn a living. Besides, it's not as if I'm doing this for my entire career. I don't exactly go on to ride a desk all day but the missions are different, more subtle. Unfortunately, other than there being more paperwork involved, that's all I can say about that because, you know - classified.

_ / JOURNAL B - SPATIAL ORIENTATION \ _



I'm standing there at the foot of the stairs listening to my voice mails. The last two are really weird.

The first is a simple recording, the voice of a twenty-something guy I don't recognize. The message is short: "Quelle horreur, I can't believe they would do something like that."

The second recording is nearly identical - same words, same speaker - but the timings and emphases differ slightly.

I'm dumbstruck. The message itself is bizarre and the fact that it's left twice even more so. I don't see how this could be random or accidental - my name and voice are right there in the greeting.

As I begin to climb the stairs, a wave of sensory distortion washes over me, pulling me back and out of my body (except I'm still in it). Most of what I'm perceiving is sort of cloudy and hazy, like if you interpose two nearly identical photos in a loop at a high frame rate. Add a soundtrack with a heavy flange and mix in a strange slippery feeling to the air, and you start to get the idea.

The old factory windows above are separating as two beams of sunshine pass through, each illuminating flickering golden dots of increasingly divergent airborne dust. Thankfully not everything is in flux. The ancient wooden stairs are solid, as is the antique-looking banister which I grip tightly.

As a young kid I'd had encounters that I would later learn are symptoms of Alice in Wonderland Syndrome. The distortions I'm currently experiencing aren't exactly the same but they have a similar texture to them; even my hands start to feel huge. I begin to smell ozone and taste metal. Maybe it's blood.

And then, just like that, the duality snaps back into one.

I'm a little dazed and feeling worn out. Could've been a flashback, tumor, injury, stroke - who the hell knows? Best not to dwell on it. I look at my watch and remember that I should've been back at my desk fifteen minutes ago. Fuck.

I double-step it up to the fourth floor, creak down the old hallway, swipe my card, punch in the daily code, glide across the floor, and ease into my chair as nonchalantly as possible.

Boss' desk is one level up, overlooking the pit where I sit. His gaudy executive throne is still empty. Guess the "social" brunch is running late. Good thing too; he can be surly when he's loaded and that's pretty much all the time, especially after brunch.

As I waggle the tension from my neck, I start to get a strange new thought. By mid-afternoon the thought has taken over and I'm questioning my whole life up until that point, seeing it in a whole new light. So much is starting to make sense now.

Even though I don't yet know what it all means, or who/what is behind it, within a few weeks my life begins to fall apart. Full recovery will take a little longer.

I learn the word "anamnesis" from Philip K. Dick.

For nearly a year I reverently lug his Exegesis around everywhere like some dog-eared holy tome. In the winter I soak it in by the south window overlooking the yard but when it's warm outside, the safe house's balcony is where I most enjoy reading it. The haggling of hookers with customers and occasional sounds of gunshots add a certain unique ambiance to the lofty reading parlour. The cheapest instant coffee money can buy helps too.

Phil's meandering search to explain his extraordinary experiences in early 1974 touches on many topics but there are some common themes: time and entropy, the machinery of reality, apocalypse, and of course anamnesis or recovered memories.

A lot of the Exegesis is swaddled in traditional Christianity and Greek classicism but there's something deeper there.

"It probably is of extraordinary significance that repudiation of the mundane reality and acknowledgment of the transmundane is a single event or act, rather than two. The two realities cannot both exist, evidently. They are counter-realities."

"Exegesis", Folder 32; November 19, 1977

As I hungrily devour Phil's magnum opus I become aware that occasionally I'm able to predict the general contents of the next page before I read them. Nothing psychic or weird, more like independently arriving at the same conclusion. Might just be the instant coffee.

I'm chin-deep in the Exegesis when I meet Al for the first time. When I hear him repeat some of the stuff I'd written for Radio Transmundane, I know I've got sync.

Synchronicity is the the lifeblood of Transmundane. It kind of has to be when you stop and think about it. The Org certainly isn't the first or only body to incorporate it into our basic training; that guy Jung and his buddy Pauli gave it a bit of a polish, helped make it hip. They did not, however, offer many meaningful tips or techniques for harnessing it effectively.

That's where Transmundane steps in.

When inexperienced Agency recruits begin to encounter synchronistic dead drops it sometimes freaks them out. Strong, repetitive, meaningful signals from the environment can be distressing when not expected and, like kundalini psychosis, can be misinterpreted as mental illness. Training can help to mitigate these effects but sometimes I still get shivers up my spine.

Problem is that most of the groups that latch onto synchronicity are new-agey hippy bullshit. Those bead curtains and bean curd sandwiches ... just awful. Why would anyone take them seriously?

The Agency, on the other hand, is a professional outfit. If we look and act like dirty vagrants it's only because we're working a cover, and even then we project an understated gravitas. It's just who we are.

Over time, most Agents develop an affect aura. It's a by-product of Transmundane training.

I have numerous run-ins with complete strangers who deferentially ask me if it's okay that they park over there, or walk up to me in a bank and hand me their debit card while whispering their PIN, or some other case of excessively mistaken identity. Sometimes the excess boils over into insistence - "Are you sure you're not a ...?"

Without prompting, people confide deeply personal details within the first few minutes of meeting me. Sometimes I think I must have a doppelganger because my interlocutors are mystified, even a little insulted, that I don't remember the long face-to-face we had at that party last night, or in the laundromat this morning, or at some other impossible place. "I promise that wasn't me," I reply. "I just have a very generic face."

Then there are the mentally ill. Mine seem to follow me around even when I secretly split for the new BOO. I know they're nearby by their enraged screams. When I walk by they suddenly go quiet and acknowledge me with a nod, a smile, and a surprisingly lucid sentence. Then they go back to punching the air or threatening the concrete wall with horrific death.

Like the force, there's a dark side to the aura too.

I find that I can lead a group of people to their demise just by walking into the street on a red light. With their focus on their devices, their base peripheral instinct takes over to follow any nearby "authority" across the road. They aren't aware of oncoming traffic until their pelvis is being crushed. Basically it's death by remote control and the worst part is that these days walking automatons are a dime a dozen.

I can sneak up on people in quiet places, I can frighten them to tears, I can get them to give me a twenty as change for a five; it comes and goes but when I get that spontaneous "lock-on", it's wacky. I don't control it and I'm not about to learn how to.

The Authority, Central Control - this is their bread and butter, and even though the bread is buttered on both sides, a Transmundane Agent knows to steer clear of it. We go for the marmalade instead.

A number of people claim to remember their birth - "I remember coming out of a dark tunnel and seeing the smiling faces of my parents". Yeah, I doubt it.

I remember my emergence into the world as being profoundly fucked up.

Everything is jumbled together, like an intense form of synesthesia. You're bombarded with perceptions and you don't know what to do with them. You don't see your parents' smiling faces, you have no fucking clue what faces are. It's all just a massive, abstract, multi-sensory collage of terrifying chaos. That's what I remember.

The only thing I'd compare it to is a few heavy hits of fortified salvia. The way that reality rends and slides apart at the seams is somewhat analogous. In comparison, acid and mushrooms are much more tame, a change of wallpaper as opposed to blowing up the whole house.

Somewhere in the psychedelic mix are those reality-slipping Alice in Wonderland experiences.

On one occasion, two of us witness a cat appear outside of a locked pet carrier seconds after it's put in. The carrier remains solidly locked, we're nonplussed, the cat couldn't care less.

But it isn't until I hit my stride as a fully-qualified Section B Agent that I get serious about this stuff. The Agency is organized, methodical, disciplined, professional; exactly what I need.

It's a lot like learning how to paint; first one needs to learn to see. That's why many instructors will tell you to place the subject upside-down, or dissect the scene into quadrants and paint their contents individually while ignoring the rest. Similarly, breaking up or otherwise altering sensory input allows for a more accurate perception, closer to experiencing what the distal stimulus actually *is*, beyond the Agent's physical filters.

It's a neat trick and drugs and illness are just two ways to pull it off. In this respect, Section B's greatest contribution to Transmundane has to be NRT.

Neural Resonance Technology, or NRT, is an umbrella term for any number of ways to manipulate the human brain using minimally invasive techniques. It's also great if NRT equipment is portable and easily replaceable because Agents will invariably be using it in the field.

At Section B we started researching some of the basic building blocks of "the Tech" about seventeen years ago, leading to the development of a standard NRT field kit.

There are, of course, components that can't be talked about, some that shouldn't, and some that are already public knowledge. In the final category, the first component of the kit is binaural beats, a very simple method of altering brainwave patterns using stereo headphones and an audio player.

It works by playing a frequency into one ear and a slightly different frequency into the other. The difference between the frequencies is perceived as a "beating", as though someone's quickly fiddling with the volume, but it's only "heard" within the brain. Over a period of about 10 to 15 minutes, the brain synchronizes with the beat frequency, effectively allowing a trained Agent to quickly shift their perceptive consciousness to a desired level.

There are many claims made about binaural beats, some intriguing but many pure bunkum. For most people binaural beats are only effective as a sleep aid, if at all.

Beats can be prerecorded or generated live on most modern smartphones and even a pair of desktop speakers placed next to the ears can do in a pinch, so the "portable and easily replaceable" conditions are satisfied.

The second addition to the NRT roster is a slightly newer effect called ganzfeld. It's a take on sensory deprivation in which the sensory field (feld) is entirely (ganz) the same. A resulting hallucinatory state can be achieved within 10 to 15 minutes.

The complete blackness of a sensory deprivation tank is one way to achieve the ganzfeld but the pragmatic Agent's field kit is more likely to contain two halves of a ping pong ball and some sticky tape to keep them over the eyes. A device screen or monitor can hold a steady color, red being the preferred hue, while the ping pong balls diffuse it into an even visual field.

Unfortunately, as with binaural beats, ganzfeld techniques are often conflated with dubious psychic and other paranormal claims, and so tend to be dismissed outright; baby, bathwater, tub - all defenestrated.

Haptic input is a little trickier and ideally includes full-body immersion through the use of rotary subwoofers, electrical muscle stimulation, or similar approaches. However, a more limited setup using a mobile phone's "vibrate" feature provides a nearly ubiquitous version for use in the field.

Taken together, a NRT field kit consists of little more than a pair of decent headphones, two halves of a ping pong ball, some sticky tape, and a mobile phone or some similar portable device. No special software is needed since most stock web browsers can perform all of the necessary functions.

Agency tech, however, doesn't stop at manipulation of perception.

In the Section it's hammered into us that as Agents we are always to avail ourselves of a basic but foundational knowledge of any technology we might employ in the field. This allows us to improvise when necessary.

Take the invisibility hood, for example. The theory behind using high-intensity infrared light-emitting diodes, sown into a hood, in order to obscure the wearer's face from modern electronic cameras doesn't require a PhD in physics to understand. Infrared is simply a non-visible wavelength of light; anyone who can see has a pretty good idea of how it behaves even if they can't see it.

Knowing that modern electronic cameras use infrared detectors to boost low-light areas of the image, it doesn't take much to connect the fact that shining a high-intensity infrared beam into such a camera will effectively blind it, like shining a bright light *right* into the eyes.

A light-emitting diode circuit is very easy to build and can operate on common portable batteries. Parts can be scavenged or cheaply purchased almost anywhere. Neat!

This understanding can also allow the Agent to build a simple night-vision system; just shine that bright IR beam outward and use a digital camera (mobile, tablet, webcam, photographic, security, etc.) to see in the dark. Additionally, the presence of any other infrared lights in the area may be revealed.

While using this device, cupping the hand directionally or fashioning some sort of parabolic dish, perhaps half of a ping pong ball, over the microphone and amplifying/isolating the sound through headphones can greatly enhance the Agent's ability to hear.

All of the enhanced abilities provided by the NRT field kit come in a small easy-to-carry format with components that are broadly available and inexpensive, if not free, and shouldn't attract any attention.

There are other, genuinely dangerous abilities that an Agent can wield using that "basic but foundational understanding" of electromagnetism, sound, and light, but aside from these the Agency always has one or two experimental irons in the fire.

I'm by no means an expert on the either topic but here's what I'm given to understand:

Neural networks are probabilistic pattern recognition systems. This means that when they're given some input pattern, an image, a sound, a piece of text, whatever, neural networks produce a percentage of certainty that the input matches other patterns that they've been trained to recognize; 0% for absolutely no match, 100% for a perfect match.

Using this property, a neural network might also be able to detect patterns in larger data sets (e.g. open civil service data), assuming any noticeable patterns exist. If these patterns do actually occur at some regular interval, every Halloween night for example, giving the neural network the date of a future Halloween night should produce a confident response (nearer to 100% than 0%).

Put another way, assuming any useful patterns exist, a neural network can be used to identify and predict them. Combined with geolocation and other information, the neural network may also be able to identify their approximate location and other recurring details.

Doesn't that sound handy? What else can it predict? What else can it do? Agency research into this area is ongoing.

There's another, more shadowy project that involves precognition and communicating bidirectionally across time. The details here are a lot more sketchy.

The Trans-Temporal Communication project is based on the surprising results of numerous scientific experiments that appear to show a tendency in the general population toward corporeal precognition, or "presentiment via the autonomic nervous system". In other words, people's bodies often respond/react to emotionally negative or positive stimuli *before* the stimuli happens. Not every time but enough to make researchers sit up and take notice.

How this translates to bidirectional communication across time is unclear. Most of the TTC project is under strict lock and key but it seems obvious that this is the organic human complement to the artificial neural network.

If I was a card-carrying Centralite right now, I'd be shitting my pants.